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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted in the Rancho Santiago Community College District to track the academic performance of 238 English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) Asian students and 301 ESL Hispanic students for three semesters (fall 1987 through spring 1988). The students had entered English 101 classes by way of ESL 110, the highest level composition class for non-native students. The purpose of the study was to determine whether these students were more or less successful in English 101 than their native English-speaking counterparts, to compare the success rates of the Asian and Hispanic groups, to assess the predictive validity of ESL grades for English 101 success, to determine whether the non-natives failing English 101 were as likely to fail other classes requiring moderate to heavy writing, and to examine whether additional hours of ESL preparation would significantly improve student performance in English 101. Asian students represented 16% of the English 101 enrollments for the period under investigation, while Hispanic students represented 20%. Study findings included the following: (1) the no-pass rate was 20% for native students, 15% for Asian students, and 23% for Hispanic students; (2) grades in ESL 110 were not reliable predictors of success in English 101, with A and B students failing at almost the same rate as C and Credit students; (3) a majority of the students who failed to complete English 101 did succeed in other departments such as history, political science, sociology, and philosophy; and (4) of seven current and recent ESL 110 instructors, all felt that current ESL offerings did not provide adequate preparation for English 101. (AYC)

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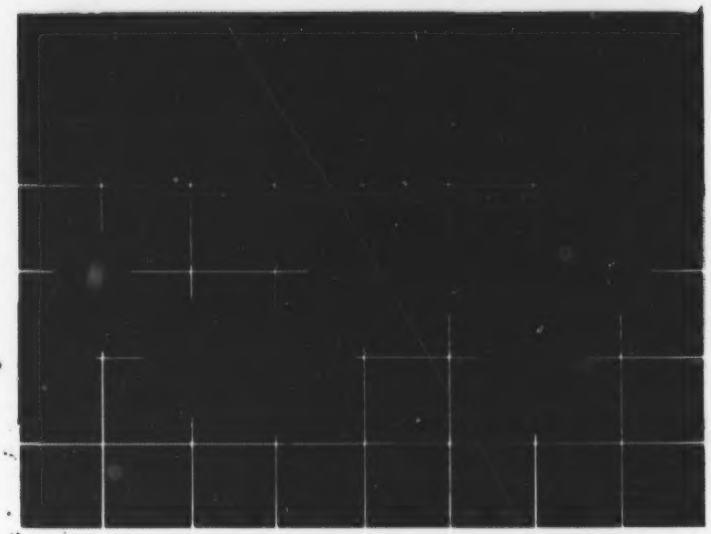

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## THE NON-NATIVE STUDENT:
## COMPETENCY IN MAINSTREAM CLASSES

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rancho santiago community college district

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Rancho Santiago Community College District

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

# THE NON-NATIVE STUDENT:
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JOHN HURLEY

SPRING 1989

## The Non-native Student: Competency in Mainstream Classes

### Executive Summary

Two non-native groups entering our English 101 classes by way of ESL 110 were tracked for three semesters: Fall, 1987; Fall and Spring, 1988. ESL 110 is our highest-level composition class for non-native students. The purpose of the study was to determine if these students were more or less successful in English 101 than their native counterparts. "Successful completion" in this study means a final grade of C or better or a grade of Cr. Other goals were to determine if one group of ESL students had more success than the other, if one kind of ESL grade was more predictive of 101 success than another, if the non-natives failing English 101 were as likely to fail other classes requiring moderate to heavy writing, and, finally, if additional hours of ESL preparation will significantly improve student performance in English 101.

- Asian (16%) and Hispanic (20%) students represented 36% of our English 101 enrollment for the period under investigation. **p 1**

- The no-pass rate for native students was 20%. The rate for Asian students was 15%, for Hispanics 23%. **pp 1-2**

- The grade received in ESL 110 was not a reliable predictor of success in English 101. Students with A and B grades who failed to complete English 101 successfully were almost as numerous as those with grades of C or Cr. **p 3**

- A majority of students failing to complete English 101 successfully did succeed in other departments such as history, political science, sociology, and philosophy. **pp 4-5**

- Most of our non-native students (84% Asian, 77% Hispanic) do complete English 101 successfully. **p 6**

- Of seven current and recent teachers of ESL 110 surveyed, all feel that current ESL offerings do not provide adequate preparation for English 101. **p 6**





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**Objective:** To determine if the no-pass rate in English 101 is higher among former ESL students than among the native population. The English 101 classes offered in Fall, 1987, Spring, 1988, and Fall, 1988 were used. A no-pass grade includes a final grade of NCr., D, F, I, or W.

| Students | Enrollment | Pass(%) | NoPass(%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Asian | 238(16%) | 202(85) | 36(15%) |
| Hispanic | 301(20%) | 232(77) | 69(23%) |
| Other | 951(64%) | 762(80) | 189(20%) |
| **Totals** | **1490(100%)** | **1196(81%)** | **294(19%)** |

Asian and Hispanic students combined make up slightly more than a third of the English 101 enrollment. Notice that the pass-rate is slightly higher for the Asian students and slightly lower for the Hispanic students than the pass-rate for the general population. To express it in **no-pass** terms, 1.5 of every ten Asian students fails to complete 101, while 2.3 of ten Hispanics are unsuccessful. For the general population, 2 of every ten students are unsuccessful. Though the Asian students have a slightly higher pass-rate ( slightly lower no-pass rate), this may be due to persistence rather than to any other factors. Because the other two groups enjoy more conversational advantages or opportunities , they may have been more highly employable, so the economy (the unemployment rate was very low at this time) rather than inability could have had as much to do with their not finishing the course. An examination of mid-term grades to see how many drop the course while passing might be a good indicator of job-related rather than academic

pressures. Of course, the Asian group is also the smallest. (In a sampling the size of either of the other two groups, the pass-rate probably would be closer to the average rate **(81%)**)

One question we cannot as easily answer, however, is this: Is the non-native's kind of success equal to that of his native counterpart? Though we don't know, there are a few ways to try to find out. We can track successful non-natives who are enrolled in university courses where rigorous writing is required. We can track the successful non-natives in our own courses conducted at English 102 level. Better yet, we can survey those English 101 teachers whose non-natives are receiving grades of C or Cr. We may discover that all C's are not equal. If so, then we're apparently using criteria other than the writing product to determine the final grades. Are we satisfied with this method? Or do we want to apply departmental holistic scoring to final exam papers written by non-natives? At any rate, if staff are not satisfied with non-native performance in English 101, if they do, indeed, feel that all C's are not equal, these feelings are not reflected in the grades. Statistically speaking, these students are doing quite well in English 101.

**Objective:** To determine if one non-native group did better or worse than the other. Though the figures shown above suggest that the Asian students did slightly better, it may be simply because they stayed around longer than the Hispanic students. If the Hispanic students possessed greater facility in spoken and written English

upon entering 101, then job opportunities may well have been the chief reason for their apparent lack of success. We don't know how many of the Hispanic students who failed to finish the program were passing the course when they left. Nor do we know how many who finished the course with grades lower than C or Cr. did so only because of heavy demands in the workplace. Considering the size of the Hispanic enrollment in English 101 (20%), it would be well worth the effort to determine to what extent economics rather than academic deficiency is accountable. A check of midterm grades interviews, perhaps both, could shed some light here.

**Objective:** To determine if the quality of the passing grade in ESL 110 predicts student success in English 101. The ESL 110 grade doesn't seem to make much difference. As the chart below shows, of **79** students completing ESL 110 successfully, about **46%** of them received grades of A or B (36). Grades of C and Cr. were evenly distributed among the remaining **56%** (43 students). Yet the first group did no better than the second in English 101; all **79** failed to complete the course successfully.

**Passing grades in ESL 110 (no-pass in English 101)**

| A 10 | B 26 | C 22 | Cr. 21 | [79] |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**Objective**: To determine if ESL students enrolled in English 101 experience the same success or failure rate in other classes requiring moderate to heavy writing. In other departments, 53 of the 79 students failing English 101 successfully completed 105 other courses. However, roughly half of those students(27) were in courses with Level 3 English prerequisites. Level 3 requires a non-native to be eligible for ESL 107. Our History 101,120, and 122 are Level 3 courses. So are Political Science 101, Psychology 100, and Sociology 100. The other half(26) were in Level 4 courses. These courses require English 101 eligibility. All our philosophy courses have Level 4 requirements. So an awareness of the Level 3 requirement enlightens us as to why a struggling non-native in our 101 courses, could experience less trouble in other courses with seemingly equivalent requirements. I say "seemingly equivalent" because I'm not sure that many English teachers are aware of the Level 3 prerequisite. I think most just assume, as I have all these years, that a student enrolled in History 122, for example, has achieved English101 rather than ESL 107 eligibility.

As for the 26 students successfully completing the Level 4 courses, explanations are not so easy to come by. It's quite possible that the student having trouble in English 101 drops out early enough to salvage some of his program. That is, if he's having trouble in 101 but holding his own in a philosophy course, he may drop the 101 course in order to put more time and effort into the other. The result, of course, would be a statistic showing him unsuccessful in

English 101 but successful in other courses that have similar writing requirements. To be sure, that's not the only explanation. Perhaps the writing never occurs at all. Without a detailed study of those courses requiring Level 4 eligibility, we have no way of knowing to what extent students actually do the kind of writing implied in the Level 4 requirement.

Now I'm not suggesting that we change the Level 3 requirement for those other courses. I'm not even sure how many , both inside and outside the English department, are aware of it. It would help if we all knew what we were all doing., which we don't. The bottom line is this: the non-native student in a history or political science course must be eligible for ESL 107, but the same student must be eligible for English 101 to gain entrance to a philosophy course or an English course in the 100/200 series. Let me put it in an extreme but concrete context: if you've taught ESL 105, picture your student taking a course in the history of Western civilization the following semester. This student has had at the most two, yes two, courses in ESL. Without passing judgment on the situation, I'm simply saying that it is a possibility, but it would take another study to reveal how common it is on our campus and whether it's helpful or harmful.

**Objective:** Finally, our study was directed to those currently or recently teaching **ESL 110** for their reaction to the proposal to add another unit to **ESL 110**. First, most of the teachers queried were not

surprised that their students had trouble in English 101. Most feel that **ESL 110** isn't quite enough. While they feel that the extra unit is better than no change, they doubt that the additional unit regardless of how it's used(more reading, more writing, more speech, or a combination of reading/writing) will make much difference. Some teachers want more units, preferably three, with emphasis on more difficult reading and interpretive writing. They feel that the present reading/writing arrangements get the student out of ESL 110 in better shape than when he entered but certainly not too well prepared to cope with the 101 program. Others have suggested a special transitional course, one that would be heavily focussed on critical thinking and critical writing, on figurative and idiomatic language, on imagery, analogy, metaphor, and simile. This would still be an **ESL** course, not 101. Others have suggested a special ESL101 as a transfer course and have indicated that other community colleges are now doing this. All **ESL 110** teachers queried feel that however well the student seems to be upon exiting 110, he is still far from being ideally prepared for 101. Though they feel that the gap between high level activity in **ESL 110** and an average performance in English 101 is difficult to bridge in a semester, the fact remains that most of our non-native students in 101 courses (84% Asian and 77% Hispanic) do complete 101 successfully.

Recommendations:

- That we engage in holistic scoring of short essays across disciplines to see if we can develop a mutually acceptable standard of writing college-wide. Such holistic exercises can take place as ***flex*** programs.

- That we try to apply the reading/English skills requirements consistently to general education classes.

- That we track Hispanic students who fail to complete 101 successfully to determine if the failure is job-related rather than course-related. By checking for passing mid-term grades in English 101, successful completion of other courses, and conducting student interviews we should be able to make reasonable determinations.

- That we survey other community colleges with heavy non-native enrollments and that we survey our teachers, especially part-time, who have taught ESL courses at various community colleges to determine the relative effectiveness of our current offerings.

- That we conduct holistic scoring sessions for teachers of English 101 and the highest ESL course as a regular ***flex*** program.

- That we look into present arrangements with our part-time ESL teachers. The currently proposed four-unit programs will apparently give part-timers more time each semester at our college.because we limit them to six units a semester. If eight units here do not pay proportionately as well as nine units elsewhere then we could have a staffing problem if we are heavily dependent upon experienced part-timers to deliver these programs.